

Message Text

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S E C R E T STATE 119432

EXDIS

FOLLOWING REPEAT BRUSSEL 4313 ACTION SECSTATE INFO COPENHAGEN

OSLO PARIS THE HAGUE MAY 14

QUOTE

S E C R E T BRUSSELS 04313

EXDIS

DEPT PASS SECDEF IMMEDIATE

E.O. 11652: XGDS-1

TAGS: MASS, BE, FR

SUBJECT: F-104 REPLACEMENT

REF: (A) BRUSSELS 4208; (B) BRUSSELS 3451

1. PRIME MINISTER TINDEMANS GAVE ME TODAY A DETAILED
ACCOUNT OF HIS SEPARATE CONVERSATIONS ON MAY 9 WITH
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GISCARD AND CHIRAC.

2. GISCARD, IN GENERAL TERMS, AND CHIRAC, IN MORE SPECIFIC TERMS, TOLD TINDEMANS THAT FRANCE WAS CONSIDERING SUGGESTING STEPS IN THE DEFENSE FIELD TO STRENGTHEN EUROPEAN COOPERATION. GISCARD AND CHIRAC SAID THAT FRANCE WAS STUDYING THE DESIRABILITY OF PROPOSING ESTABLISHING IN THE EC-NINE FRAMEWORK A EUROPEAN COUNCIL ON SECURITY. THE PURPOSE OF THIS COUNCIL WOULD BE TO STUDY ARMS REQUIREMENTS AND TO FACILITATE ARMS PRODUCTION ON A EUROPEAN BASIS. THE FRENCH SAID THAT IT WOULD BE TOO COMPLEX TO SET UP EUROPEAN-WIDE PRODUCTION FOR ALL ARMS. IT WOULD BE MORE EFFICIENT TO DECIDE WHICH COUNTRY SHOULD TAKE THE LEAD IN EACH AREA OF ARMS PRODUCTION; THEN THAT COUNTRY WOULD HAVE THE PRIMARY RESPONSIBILITY FOR COORDINATING EUROPEAN PRODUCTION IN THAT AREA. CHIRAC SAID THAT HE WAS ALSO IN FAVOR OF FRANCE'S REJOINING THE EURO GROUP BUT THAT GISCARD WAS HOLDING BACK FOR DOMESTIC POLITICAL REASONS.

3. ACCORDING TO TINDEMANS, THE FRENCH DID NOT MAKE THEIR INTEREST IN A EUROPEAN COUNCIL ON SECURITY OR THEIR POSSIBLE RE-ENTRY IN THE EURO GROUP CONDITIONAL ON BELGIAN (AND DUTCH) PURCHASE OF THE F-1 BUT THEY IMPLIED THAT THESE ISSUES WERE RELATED.

4. CHIRAC TOLD TINDEMANS THAT FRANCE WOULD MAKE NO MONEY ON THE SALE OF THE F-1 AND THAT FOURCADE WAS UNHAPPY WITH THE HEAVY SUBSIDIES NECESSARY TO BRING THE F-1 PRICE DOWN TO THE F-16 PRICE. THE FRENCH WERE EAGER TO SELL THE F-1 FOR REASONS OF NATIONAL PRIDE AND PRESTIGE.

5. UPON LEAVING PARIS, TINDEMANS TOLD THE FRENCH THAT THE BELGIAN POSITION WAS OPEN AND THAT EVERYTHING WAS POSSIBLE.

6. BACK IN BRUSSELS, TINDEMANS HELD AN INNER CABINET MEETING. HE TOLD DEFENSE MINISTER VANDEN BOEYNANTS TO EXAMINE THE SIGNIFICANCE OF FRANCE'S REJOINING THE EURO GROUP AND INSTRUCTED FOREIGN MINISTER VAN ELSLANDE TO EXPLORE WITH THE OTHER EC COUNTRIES THEIR ATTITUDE TOWARD A EUROPEAN COUNCIL FOR SECURITY.

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7. WITH REGARD TO THE EURO GROUP, TINDEMANS RECALLED WHAT VANDEN BOEYNANTS HAD SAID AFTER RETURNING FROM THE MEETING OF THE MINISTERS OF THE EURO GROUP IN LONDON ON MAY 7. HE SAID THAT IF FRANCE DID NOT REJOIN THE EURO GROUP, FRANCE WOULD NOT BE ABLE TO SELL EVEN A SLIGHTSHOT IN EUROPE.

8. WITH REGARD TO THE POSSIBILITY OF A EUROPEAN COUNCIL ON SECURITY, TINDEMANS SAID THAT HE HAD HAD A PRELIMINARY TELEPHONE DISCUSSION WITH SCHMIDT, WHO WAS ENTIRELY NON-COMMITTAL, SAYING HE WOULD THINK ABOUT IT. ALTHOUGH VAN ELSLANDE HAS NOT YET TALKED TO OTHER EUROPEAN COUNTRIES, TINDEMANS DOUBTS THAT THE EUROPEAN COUNCIL ON SECURITY WILL BE ESTABLISHED. HE THINKS THAT AT LEAST IRELAND AND DENMARK WILL OPPOSE IT.

9. CN ESSESSING THE MEANING OF ALL OF THIS, TINDEMANS MAKE THE FOLLOWING POINTS:

A. HE IS AN ATLANTIST AND WILL OPPOSE ANY ANTI-AMERICAN SOLUTION.

B. IF IT HAD NOT BEEN FOR THE BLIND DEVOTIION OF VANDEN BOEYNANTS TO THE MIRAGE, A BELGIAN DECISION TO BUY THE F-16 WOULD HAVE BEEN MADE LONG AGO.

C. THE QUESTION OF WHICH PLANE TO BUY REMAINS AN EMOTIONAL ISSUE, WITH BOTH THE COUNTRY AND THE GOVERNMENT DIVIDED ON LINGUISTIC LINES. TINDEMANS' PROBLEM IS HOW TO MAKE A DECISION AND MAINTAIN HIS GOVERNMENT IN POWER. THE AVOIDANCE OF A DECISION DOES NOT SEEM TO BE AN ACCEPTABLE OPTION BECAUSE TINDEMANS COULD BE CHARGED WITH VACILATION. TINDEMANS' DECISION WOULD BE FACILITATED IF HE COULD POINT TO SOME OUTSIDE CIRCUMSTANCE T JUSTIFY A DECISION ONE WAY OR THE OTHER. TINDEMANS' RESPONSES TO OUR QUESTIONS SUGGEST THAT HE SEES THE DYNAMICS OF THE SITUATION AS FOLLOWS: IF THE OTHER THREE MEMBERS OF THE CONSORTIUM DECIDE TO BUY THE F-16, BELGIUM PROBABLY WOULD GO ALONG. HOWEVER, IF IT APPEARED THAT A EUROPEAN COUNCIL FOR SECURITY COULD BE
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ESTABLISHED AND IF FRANCE WERE TO REJOIN THE EURO GROUP, A BELGIAN DECISION TO PURCHASE THE F-1 WOULD BE MORE LIKELY. TINDEMANS STRESSED THAT HE INSISTS ON BOTH CONDITIONS AND HAD SUPPORT EVEN FROM SOME FRANCOPHONE MEMBERS OF HIS CABINET ON THIS POINT. OTHERWISE, TINDEMANS SAID, THE CREATION OF THE EUROPEAN COUNCIL ON SECURITY AND THE PURCHASE OF THE FRENCH AIRCRAFT COULD BE INTERPRETED AS ANTI-AMERICAN.

10. WE ASKED TINDEMANS ABOUT TIMING AND HE REPLIED THAT HE HOPED TO BE ABLE TO WRAP THIS UP BY MAY 31 BUT THAT IT MIGHT NOT BE POSSIBLE NOT ONLY DID HE HAVE A DIFFICULT POLITICAL PROBLEM THAT COULD TOPPLE HIS GOVERNMENT, BUT THE DUTCH PRIME MINISTER, DEN UYL, DID ALSO. TINDEMANS WANTS TO TALK TO DEN UYL WHEN HE GETS

BACK FROM THE US.

1. TINDEMANS CONCLUDED BY SAYING THAT HE WANTS TO DISCUSS THIS PROBLEM WITH SECRETARY KISSINGER WHEN HE COMES TO BRUSSELS FOR THE NATO SUMMIT. TINDEMANS IS ESPECIALLY INTERESTED IN KNOWING WHAT THE US REACTION WOULD BE TO THE CREATION OF A EUROPEAN COUNCIL FOR SECURITY AND THE IMPORTANCE THE US WOULD GIVE TO FRANCE'S REJOINING THE EURO GROUP. TINDEMANS SAID THE FRENCH CLAIM THAT THE US FAVORS THE CREATION OF A EUROPEAN DEFENSE GROUP.

12. ACTION REQUESTED: ANY INDICATION OF THE SECRETARY'S WILLINGNESS IN PRINCIPLE TO SEE TINDEMANS ON THIS RANGE OF SUBJECTS WOULD BE WELCOMED BY TINDEMANS. ALSO, IT WOULD BE HELPFUL TO US TO HAVE A PRELIMINARY REACTION FROM WASHINGTON ON THE US ATTITUDE TOWARD A EUROPEAN COUNCIL FOR SECURITY AND FRANCE'S REJOINING THE EURO GROUP FIRESTONE. UNQUOTE INGERSOLL

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